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Relationship between disarmament and development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 54/54 T.

In accordance with the programme of activities adopted by the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development, established by the Secretary-General at its inaugural meeting on 26 May 1999, and within the financial constraints of the Organization, a number of activities were undertaken to promote a better understanding of the disarmament and development relationship in the context of current international relations.

* A/55/150.

** The finalization of the present report was dependent on inputs from other component departments/agencies represented in the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development.

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I. Introduction

1. Since 1987, the General Assembly has annually requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the action programme adopted at the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development,[1] which was held at United Nations Headquarters in September 1987. Paragraph 35 (ix) of the action programme emphasized the need to strengthen the central role of the United Nations and its appropriate organs in the field of disarmament and development in promoting an interrelated perspective of these issues within the overall objective of promoting international peace and security. The action programme also called for greater efforts by the United Nations to promote collective knowledge of non-military threats to international security.

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/54 T of 1 December 1999, entitled "Relationship between disarmament and development". In that resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to take action, through appropriate organs and within available resources, for the implementation of the action programme adopted at the International Conference and to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

3. In his previous report to the General Assembly, dated 19 August 1999 (A/54/254), the Secretary-General referred to the establishment of the high-level Steering Group on Disarmament and Development, which held its inaugural meeting on 26 May 1999. In that report, he has also referred to the programme of activities adopted by the Steering Group. One of the salient features of that programme was organizing periodic seminars/symposia to focus on specific issues in the disarmament and development field in the context of current international relations, and providing a forum where relevant United Nations bodies, non-governmental organizations and other international agencies could share their experience in areas of common concerns. In the same report, the Secretary-General noted that in view of the continuing financial constraints on the Organization, the proposed activities devoted to disarmament and development would become more affordable with voluntary contributions from Member States.

II. Action taken

4. In accordance with the decision taken by the Steering Group on Disarmament and Development, the Department for Disarmament Affairs of the Secretariat, in collaboration with the NGO Committee on Disarmament, organized a panel discussion on the theme of transparency, accountability and good governance during the annual Disarmament Week at United Nations Headquarters on 25 October 1999. The speakers were drawn from the International Monetary Fund, Economists Allied for Arms Reduction, the Washington-based Overseas Development Council and Rice University.[2] Issues related to military expenditure, security sector reform and development were discussed. In the context of military expenditure, of particular interest were policy guidelines adopted by the Fund in addressing such issues within

[1] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.87.IX.8, para. 35.

[2] Nancy Happe (International Monetary Fund), Nicole Ball (Overseas Development Council), Michael Intriligator (Economists Allied for Arms Reduction) and Dagobert Brito (Rice University).

the framework of public sector spending by Governments. It was pointed out that, although national security and hence the level of defence spending were not directly within the purview of the Fund, such spending had economic implications and in some situations had a bearing on fiscal transparency and governance. The role of the Fund in providing macro-level assistance in post-conflict situations was also discussed. The discussion touched on civil-military relations within the framework of improved governance in the security sector. In the context of arms transparency, reference was made to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms as a significant global instrument, which was serving as a valuable source of information. In that regard, reference was also made to another global instrument — the United Nations standardized format for reporting military expenditure — in which participation, so far, was less universal. Finally, the question of the peace dividend was discussed and in that context the short and long-term economic implications of reduced military expenditure. It was observed that while there could be short-term costs arising from a reduction in defence spending, in the long run the economic implications would be positive.

5. In paragraph 11 of his previous report on the subject, the Secretary-General referred to the holding of a symposium on disarmament and development on 20 July 1999 at United Nations Headquarters under the aegis of the Steering Group. Subsequently, in June 2000, the presentations made at the symposium were published in a booklet entitled "United Nations 1999 Symposium on Disarmament and Development", by the Economists Allied for Arms Reduction in consultation with the Department for Disarmament Affairs.[3] The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat helped to organize the symposium and contributed a panellist whose presentation on economic and social aspects of disarmament was summarized in the booklet. The subjects discussed at this symposium were outlined in paragraph 12 of the report of the Secretary-General.

6. In June 1999, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs convened at United Nations Headquarters an Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on the subject of patterns and trends in public expenditures and their implications for national and international development strategies. Two presentations by outside experts addressed the issues of the current level of military expenditures and the cost-effectiveness of providing defence as a public good, one in Latin America and the Caribbean and another one in States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and of the former Warsaw Treaty Organization. The importance of identifying relevant indicators and carrying out systematic analysis was emphasized for assessing the economic and social impacts of military spending at the national and international levels. Completed papers from the meeting were issued in December 1999 on the web site of the Division for Public Economics and Public Administration (see ST/ESA/PAD/SER.E/85 or http://www.un.org/esa/governance/E85.PDF).

7. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), through its Trust Fund for the Reduction and Prevention of the Proliferation of Small Arms, is supporting a number of micro-disarmament projects within the context of its country and regional programming. Recognizing the linkages between security and development, UNDP aims to mainstream disarmament measures into its work in relevant sectors,

[3] A limited number of copies of this publication, which has appeared under the occasional paper series of the Economists Allied for Arms Reduction, are available with the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Economists Allied for Arms Reduction.

including in areas such as the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, legal sector development and policing support. Where possible, UNDP shapes its broader development programmes to tackle some of the key underlying causes of small arms proliferation and insecurity, with a view towards sustaining development gains by helping to prevent the reoccurrence of violent conflict.

8. The Department for Disarmament Affairs continued its increased cooperation with UNDP on the disarmament and development approach reflected in the weapons for development programmes pursued in the context of combating the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. In this regard, UNDP and the Department worked closely in the implementation of a pilot project in Albania. UNDP is also cooperating closely with the Department on a number of small arms fact-finding missions, and will be closely involved in their follow-up.

9. On 21 June 2000, the Department for Disarmament Affairs and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with Economists Allied for Arms Reduction and the World Policy Institute, organized a panel discussion at United Nations Headquarters on the subject of the implications of the restructuring of the global arms industry.[4] The panel included speakers from the arms industry and non-governmental experts with a long-standing involvement in arms trade and related issues. With regard to the globalization of the arms industry, reference was made to mergers, including cross-border mergers that could lead to the non-existence of purely national arms companies. Reference was also made to the limited regulation of technology diffusion and the trend towards growing commercialization of the arms trade in recent years. On the question of illicit small arms and light weapons, it was mentioned that often legal weapons ended up in illicit circulation, indicating the need to destroy surplus stocks left over from conflicts and those in government storage that were not in use or no longer needed. It was observed that societal issues also needed to be addressed in combating illicit small arms and light weapons. The cascading effect of surplus stocks of conventional arms, including major weapons, resulting from the decline in demand in producer countries was also discussed. It was observed that a phenomenon that had contributed to the export of surplus weapons was that selling such weapons was considered cheaper than destroying the surplus stock.

10. The Department for Disarmament Affairs has begun a process of consultations with independent experts to elicit their views and perspectives on the changing paradigm of disarmament and development in the context of current international relations in order to ascertain the configuration of informed opinion on this subject. The first of a series of consultations was held with the Bonn International Centre for Conversion in July 2000.

11. In a note verbale dated 24 March 2000, the Secretary-General drew the attention of the Member States to paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 54/54 T. To date, the Secretary-General has received one reply. Any further replies received will be issued as addenda to the present report.

[4] The panelists included Joel Johnson (Vice President International, Aerospace Industries Association), Janne Nolan (The Century Foundation), Natalie Goldring (University of Maryland, College Park), William Hartung (World Policy Institute) and David Gold (former Senior Economic Affairs Officer of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat).

III. Information received from Governments

Colombia

[Original:Spanish]
[23 May 2000]

Colombia believes in the validity of the following words from the Final Document of the International Conference on the Relationship between Disarmament and Development:

> "The world can either continue to pursue the arms race with characteristic vigour or move consciously and with deliberate speed towards a more stable and balanced social and economic development within a more sustainable international economic and political order; it cannot do both."

In spite of the progress made by some countries in the area of social and economic development, such progress continues to show huge imbalances by comparison with military expenditures: in at least 84 countries military expenditures exceed expenditure on health; in every third developing country military expenditures exceed the amount spent on education.

Clearly, then, public health and education budgets could be doubled in one third of developing countries if the burden of military expenditures could be reduced. Yet, these countries and other countries throughout the globe continue to arm themselves and to threaten each other. Approximately US$ 8 trillion has been spent on nuclear weapons alone, or the equivalent of one third of the value of world production in 1997.

The vast resources spent on weapons research, development, production and traffic also contrast with the poor skills of the international community in preventing wars and their dreadful consequences. According to recent estimates, more than 35 million persons, 90 per cent of whom were civilians, have lost their lives in the 170 wars that have occurred since the end of the Second World War, including those that are currently being waged.

Although a number of voluntary organizations and well-intentioned Governments devote large sums of money to the economic rehabilitation of various war-torn regions and countries, actions to prevent war have not been adequately developed. Such actions include: confidence-building measures, transparency and exchange of information on military matters, restrictions on military matters, restrictions on military sites, reduction of troop levels and limitation of the production, stockpiling and traffic of arms. Above all else, prevention of war involves the strict observance of the international principles embodied in the Charter of the United Nations.

Mobilizing the awareness of the international community in order to make disarmament and human development a tangible reality also requires such other actions as: strengthening education for peace in schools; eliminating public subsidies to the military industry; converting part of the military industry to civil production industries; directing the resources released through disarmament to human development; and acceding to and universally applying the various disarmament and arms limitation agreements.

The resources released by disarmament could make a real difference in the efforts to attain the basic goals of human development and poverty eradication. The eradication of poverty, especially insofar as its worst aspects are concerned, is within reach of the international community and should come into play in the early part of the twenty-first century. However, in order to make this goal a reality, it is first necessary to free the resources employed in the production and traffic of arms and to devote them to human development and security.